

with an additional supply of the old sources. For thus men would see that they have sources of pleasure unknown to their ancestors, and would derive pleasure from the fact. This consideration is however, though worth noticing, not important, as men are much more apt to compare themselves with their contemporaries whom they see around them every day, than with their forbears whose lives they dimly realise through the medium of books and traditions.

But there is a different kind of comparison on which happiness depends. Men may be happy not merely because they compare themselves with other men and think themselves happier, but also because they compare their present state with a previous state in which they were less happy. The human race has often anticipated and repeated Dante's judgment that the greatest grief is to remember in misery past happiness. It is equally true that happiness is intensified by comparison with one's own past misery. Virgil makes storm-tost Æneas look forward to a time when the agonies endured in a tempestuous sea will be a subject for pleasant reflection, and the number of times that the words,

Forsitan hæc olim meminisse juvabit,

have been since quoted shows that the truth of the idea has been generally recognised. This same close connection between pleasure and pain had been recognised long before by Plato. Socrates, in the *Phædo*, being released from his chain as a preliminary to his execution, remarks: "How singular is the thing called pleasure, and how curiously related to pain, which might be thought to be the opposite of it; for they never will come to a man together, and yet he who pursues either of them is generally compelled to take the other. Their bodies are two, and yet they are joined to a single head; and I cannot help thinking that if Æsop had noticed them, he would have made a fable about God trying to reconcile their

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# THE PROMOTION OF GENERAL HAPPINESS

*A UTILITARIAN ESSAY*

BY

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We cannot expect to agree in our utilitarian estimates, at least without much debate. We must agree to differ, and though we are bound to argue fearlessly, it should be with the consciousness that there is room for wide and *bond fide* difference of opinion. We must consent to advance cautiously, step by step, feeling our way, adopting no foregone conclusions, trusting no single science, expecting no infallible guide.—  
JEVONS : *The State in Relation to Labour*.

LONDON  
SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO.  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE  
1890

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## PREFACE.



IN the following pages I have borrowed from Professor Henry Sidgwick the useful word "felicific," and doubtless I have in many passages been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the same writer. It would indeed have been impossible for me to read his *Methods of Ethics* for ten successive years in the ordinary routine of my Indian work, each year with increased admiration for the Aristotelian thoroughness of the discussions it contains, without having my opinions on many subjects, and my way of looking at all questions, considerably affected thereby.

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## SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

### CHAPTER I.

~~GENERAL REMARKS.~~—Even if happiness entirely depended on comparison of our own possessions with those of others, happiness might be increased (1) by discovery of a more miserable race of beings, (2) by spread of pessimistic ideas. So far as it depends on comparison with previous generations, it can be increased by the discovery of new sources of pleasure. So far as it depends on comparison with our own past state, it may be increased by sudden increase of production or discovery of new sources of pleasure. But happiness is not always due to comparison, and therefore other sources of happiness must be considered. Custom blunts our sensibility to pleasure and pain, but does not make it impossible to increase or decrease general happiness. We must assume, unless there is reason to the contrary, that the increase of any individual's happiness increases general happiness ... 1

### CHAPTER II.

~~KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION.~~—Knowledge being imperfect cannot give mental satisfaction, nor can mankind by increase of knowledge gain happiness through a feeling of superiority, nor can greater knowledge of the world's condition be assumed to be productive of happiness unless we accept optimism. Increase of knowledge will direct aright utilitarian action, and will be expected by the utilitarian to lead to the more general adoption of utilitarianism. It will also prevent useless riots and rebellions. The spread of female education should be especially encouraged by the utilitarian as the best remedy for the infelicitic inequality between the sexes ... 12

### CHAPTER III.

~~INVENTIVE KNOWLEDGE.~~—The power over nature given by knowledge being still imperfect gives no more mental satisfaction

PAGE

than the less power possessed by the ancients. The mariner's compass, by increasing the population of the world, has had a doubtful effect on happiness, and the same may be said of free trade, steam engines, and other inventions whose chief effect has been to increase production and population. Printing increases happiness in some ways and diminishes it in others. Material comforts, though much improved by modern inventions, afford no more pleasure than the inferior luxuries of old times. Familiarity deprives them of their charm ... 22

## CHAPTER IV.

MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE.—Most medical inventions improve the health of the individual, but cannot improve the general health, unless their application is limited in a way that is practically out of the question. Anæsthetics, however, do promote general happiness ... 41

## CHAPTER V.

AID TO NATURAL SELECTION.—The utilitarian should not encourage destructive agencies in order to eliminate the unhealthy. Such agencies improve the happiness of future generations at the expense of a probably equal amount of pain to the generation weeded out by their operation. Infanticide improves the average health and strength, but at the expense of a large amount of moral evil, productive of more misery than the happiness due to improved health and strength. War, in spite of its eventual good results, should be discouraged by the utilitarian, because it is such an extremely painful remedy, and is, owing to human passion, always likely to be excessively prevalent. Therefore, the utilitarian should encourage arbitration, extension of political aggregates, and, above all, the enrolment of large armies for purely defensive purposes. The industrial competition between Asiatic and European labour threatens such a vast amount of misery, that it should be prevented by the utilitarian, if he can devise any effectual means for the purpose ... 57

## CHAPTER VI.

AMUSEMENTS.—Out-door sports. Hunting, though intensely enjoyed and though not inimical to the happiness of animals, is doubtfully felicitic owing to its injurious effects on sympathy. Other active out-door sports are decidedly felicitic. Amusement in admiration of the beautiful should be considered very felicitic by the pessimist utilitarian, moderately so by the utilitarian who is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. The

optimist will be doubtful, as the cultivation of the beautiful	PAGE
decreases population ... ..	72

## CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES IN LAW AND CUSTOM.—Happiness certainly may be and has been increased by legal and constitutional changes. Laws of a socialistic tendency and protection may be more reasonably supported by pessimistic than by optimistic utilitarians. Limitation of production by diminution of work would not increase the reward of labour. It would diminish population and so be approved by pessimists. Laws limiting labour of women and children seem productive of happiness. Strikes, trades unions, &c., do some good because the fear of them helps to keep wages up above the lowest limit. High wages add to happiness. High wages would not be permanently secured by confiscation of all landed property. The principal way in which wages may be permanently improved is by increased prudence among the working classes. Education may also do something to ameliorate their condition (1) by conducting to prudence, (2) by enabling them to calculate better. Mere diminution of taxation need not promote happiness. Happiness is diminished by unjust taxes, by taxes tempting to immoral conduct, and by unnecessary change of taxation. ... 87

## CHAPTER VIII.

CHANGES IN LAW AND CUSTOM.—Oriental seclusion of women, child-marriage and enforced widowhood diminish happiness. Caste by its exaltation of some sections of the community and its degradation of others is inimical to happiness, and also by its encouragement of suttee. But caste does good by enforcing with great power obedience to ordinary moral rules. It would therefore be dangerous to overthrow it from without, and better to reform it from within by means of education ... 118

## CHAPTER IX.

VEGETARIANISM AND TOTAL ABSTINENCE.—Vegetarianism can only be regarded as felicitic, if total abstinence which it promotes is felicitic. Total abstinence may be shown to be felicitic by the great amount of crime due to drinking. The chief danger of vegetarianism and total abstinence, the inability to diminish expenditure without suffering from want, must be avoided by raising the standard of comfort and encouraging the unproductive consumption of other luxuries than flesh and alcohol.

	PAGE
The same object may be effected by life insurance, which is therefore, and, because it promotes equality of fortune, clearly felicitic ...	139

## CHAPTER X.

THE MORAL VIRTUES AND RELIGION.—Utilitarian moral virtue of course promotes happiness or we should have a contradiction in terms. Utilitarians must determine praise and blame by the same standard as they apply to other acts. Unswerving truth and entire avoidance of deceit are probably more felicitic than the slightest modification of truth by other considerations. Justice as understood by the utilitarian means distribution productive of general happiness, however contrary that distribution may be to ordinary ideas of justice. Benevolence in the form of charity is, as a rule, doubtfully felicitic and needs careful limitation. In its other forms, including politeness, it is more clearly felicitic as revealing and increasing sympathy. The increase of sympathy promotes happiness, but it is not easy to increase sympathy except by the instrumentality of religion, which may with great force promote, not only sympathy, but the highest utilitarian morality, and so add more than anything else can do to the happiness of the world ... 163

# T H E

## PROMOTION OF GENERAL HAPPINESS

### CHAPTER I.

UTILITARIANS regard the increase of the happiness of the world as the only reasonable end of conduct, as the only object desirable in itself. According to them even virtue itself would not be desirable unless it promoted the happiness of the world, and, if it had the contrary effect, would be the reverse of desirable. This extreme opinion is only held by a fraction of civilised men, a large number of whom consider that not only virtue but also knowledge and art are desirable for their own sake. But even those who regard virtue, knowledge, art and other objects as desirable for their own sakes regard general happiness as also desirable for its own sake. Some might possibly prefer or think they prefer in certain cases increase of virtue, knowledge, and art to increase of happiness, but, if they saw that a certain action would increase happiness and would have no prejudicial results in any other directions, they would think such an action ought to be done. Even the sternest moralists and religious teachers, who show us the admirable discipline afforded by pain, do not appear to be exceptions. For, though they think pain sometimes desirable in the interests of virtue and religion, they would prefer happiness if it



were equally conducive to the same end. If beautiful music promoted virtue as much as a trying bodily disease, who would not prefer the former to the latter? Thus it appears that everyone, or at any rate everyone whose opinion is worth taking into consideration, prefers general happiness to general misery either absolutely or *ceteris paribus*. Therefore we may well consider it a question of universal interest whether the general happiness can be promoted by any means, and if so, by what means.

There is one general argument against the possibility of promoting happiness, which, if accepted, will finally close the question we are considering. It may be argued that all happiness depends upon comparison of one's own possessions with another's, that, if a man is happy, it must be because he possesses or thinks he possesses a larger supply of health, wealth and other generally desired objects than other men have. If this is the whole truth of the matter, it might be argued that no human effort can increase the happiness of the world. Certainly in that case it would be useless to try to increase the world's happiness by making the human race wealthier, healthier, or longer lived. Under the supposition the human race would be thereby no more benefited than the candidates in a competitive examination would be by having all their marks doubled. Nevertheless, there would still be other conceivable means by which happiness might be increased. Supposing the human race could become firmly convinced of the existence of some other previously unknown class of beings, say, the inhabitants of another planet less provided with the usual objects of desire than themselves, then the happiness of the human race would be increased, as the happiness of the saints is supposed by some of the ancient fathers to be enhanced by contemplation of the punishment of the damned. But this discovery must not be mutual or else happiness would still remain unaffected. For the happiness of the in-

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habitants of the other planet would be decreased by the discovery as much as the happiness of the human race would be increased, and the positive and negative quantities would cancel each other. Therefore the utilitarian would have to do his best to defend the inhabitants of the less fortunate planet against the infelicitous consequences which would result to them from the knowledge of our better fortunes. But owing to the little probability of being able to discover a new unknown race of beings, and the equal probability of such a race if discovered being more and not less fortunately circumstanced than the human race, the utilitarian, convinced of the comparative nature of happiness, would try to find other means to increase it. He would perhaps try to affect not the facts contemplated but the contemplating mind, and would strive to divert his fellow men from the contemplation of those superior to themselves in the possession of objects of desire, to the contemplation of the many who suffer most from poverty, disease and other evils. Much might be done by disseminating among the multitude at cheap prices the works of Voltaire, Leopardi, Schopenhauer and other pessimists, in order that by reading their descriptions of the misery of the human race, and recognising themselves to be less miserable than the average human being is supposed to be by philosophic observers who have carefully studied the matter, they might feel their superiority over the average man and thereby become happier.

So far we have been considering the consequences that would follow if happiness depended entirely on comparison of one's own condition with that of contemporary men. We also sometimes compare our condition with that of previous generations, and this comparison affects happiness to a certain limited extent. So far as this is the case, it is possible for ordinary human effort to increase happiness by, for instance, endowing each successive generation with sources of pleasure unknown before or

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